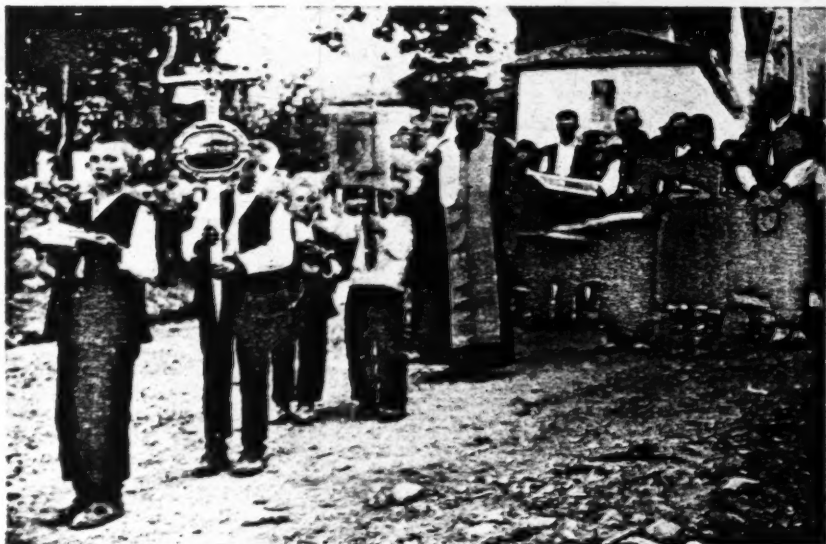


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"The procession . . . was led by a boy carrying . . . boiled wheat to be placed on the grave." See page 38.

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"Many times we carry clothes to the river . . . where we pound them with the *buhalka*." See page 39.

[facing p. 33]

753 many times the doctors cannot help. They cannot give a second soul to the sick. If he has some more days to live, he will live; if not, he will die. Doctors are not God and even the doctors die as well."

761 In keeping with this fatalistic attitude toward sickness, the peasants accepted death as simply as they would any life process. Before I began my study of Dragalevtsy I was already familiar with the peasants' conception of death. One account which had proved helpful in gaining this understanding appeared in the *Bulgarian-British Review* back in 1931, and was written by Mrs. A. Vessova. She said in part:

775 "Death to these people is not considered the end; it is but the
761 continuation of the earthly life in another sphere—the invisible world. The bounden duty of the family is to prepare the dying for their long journey so that they will not have to roam disconsolately in the darkness without finding their way to their new surroundings. Of the dying person they repeat to one another that he or she is now a traveler. Their first duty is to light a candle which they place above the head of the patient, so that they may not see it, should they happen to be conscious. Should the patient be allowed to die without lighting this particular candle, it is considered by the villagers to bring great discredit on the family. The meaning of the candle is that when the soul starts upon its long journey it has to pass through dark passages, and the candle will light the way.

"... As soon as the neighbors hear the announcement [of the death] they immediately throw away all the water found in the house, and proceed to the fountain to replenish all their vessels. The same procedure takes place in the house of the deceased. There is no clear explanation for this custom or its real meaning, but it is supposed to symbolize, as do other customs, that as the water flows smoothly and evenly, so the voyage of the soul will be made smooth and easy.

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775 "The peasants believe that though invisible the soul continues to keep the form of the body which it has just left. For this reason the deceased is laid to rest in his grave in his ordinary clothing. Led by his or her angel, for they believe that every human being at his

birth receives a guardian angel, the soul of the deceased after leaving this world starts first to visit all the people and places where it has been when on this earth. This journey, no matter how great the distance may be, must be completed in forty days. If the departed has lived most of his time in his village, and only occasionally has gone to neighboring towns or villages, the journey will be an easy and pleasant one, but if he has traveled great distances the journey will be tiring and rough. It may be that this belief has been responsible for keeping the peasants so firmly attached to their land and village, and preventing them from migrating to new lands. . . .

"The soul has started on its journey, while the body is still in the house, being mourned by the family and the neighbors. The members of the family throw grains of corn or wheat into the coffin. They also believe that there is a great river to be passed and if the deceased has no money he will be unable to cross, and his journey will be impeded. Another peculiar belief is that the neighbors send through him messages to their departed, firmly believing that he will deliver them."

Investigation showed that these statements held true generally of Dragalevtsy but needed to be supplemented. For one thing, the villagers had definite ways of foretelling death. They said, for instance, that there were as many stars in the sky as there were people on earth, and that there was a particular star for each person. When a star fell to the ground, someone was said to have died and his star to have gone out like his soul. If the star merely moved from one place to another, then its particular earthly representative had changed his residence. Many peasants also believed that "stars with tails" (meteors) foretold some great misfortune to be sent by God. Usually they were thought to signify war "because before the Balkan War and the World War there were such." But there were even more specific ways of predicting death in any given locality. When the owls cried at sunset toward a house or when a hen crowed, death was sure to follow soon. Certain dreams indicated the coming of death. Bai Angel, the village registrar, told me that a soldier could be practically certain of death if he dreamed of a snake. He supported this belief with the story of an officer in the first World War who lined up his men before a battle and went down the ranks to shake hands with

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763 the soldiers and told them that he would not return from the fight. He
787 was sure of this because he had dreamed of a snake during the night.
Sure enough, he was killed in the action that followed.

If a person dreamed of a wedding or that he was leading a *boro*, death was probable; or if he dreamed of having a tooth pulled, the same held true. If he dreamed that he saw a deep black hole (similar to a grave), someone connected with him would die; if it was white inside, somebody else would die; if he fell into the hole, he would die.

● 764 In Dragalevtsy there were certain old women who considered themselves specialists in the preparation of the body for burial. They were "priestesses of superstition" who saw to it that all the pagan rites were carried out before the priest arrived to conduct the funeral. Their presence at any crisis showed the duality of the peasants' view of the universe.

771 God was thought to be the force symbolizing the Good. The
793 priest was His representative and should be given due respect; furthermore, he should be asked to perform all of the customary ceremonies such as the sprinkling of holy water in every room of the house at Bogoyavlenie or Epiphany on the nineteenth of January. Keeping on the good side of the priest meant keeping on the good side of God, whose favors one needs both in this life and the next.

[771] Inasmuch as they believed in a principle of Good at work in the
754 universe, it was logical for the peasants to believe in a principle of Evil which could do them harm, with or without the consent of the Good. Some parts of the church ceremonies, such as spitting over the child at the devil during the christening, were directed at nullifying the efforts of the Evil One. Seeing that the church concerned itself chiefly with the Good, the peasant in his naivete felt compelled to do something to ward off the Evil, and thus perpetuated many primitive customs which startle both educated Bulgarians and those westerners who are not familiar with the equally primitive customs found within certain areas of their own supposedly civilized lands.

754 The intermediaries in this "cult of the Evil Eye, Devil, Bad Luck"
789 were certain old women, called *babi*, already described in the account of a village birth.¹ These women showed people how to keep the Evil Eye away. They advised mothers whose babies were only one

¹ [See pp. 30-31, category 116-- Analyst]

or two months old to make a spot on the baby's neck beneath the ear, using axle grease from the wagon. The spell of the Evil Eye could be cast by one who was envious or of an evil heart. That is why I soon stopped complimenting babies or animals, for the frightened look that came into the mother's or owner's eyes on occasion showed me that mine must seem an envious heart. Such envy was supposed to cause sickness in the object admired. Then a *baba* who was old and ugly, with crooked teeth, pale and wrinkled face, and sunken eyes, was called upon to perform a magic rite (*baiane*). Water was put in a pottery bowl, an incantation was read, and live coals were dropped into the water. Some people suggested that an Evil Eye might be kept away by hanging an onion or garlic over the house, or by wearing blue beads. A few people were said to dye good animals in order to distract the attention of people from their good qualities.

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Along with the belief in the Evil Eye was the belief in vampires. No cat or dog should ever be allowed to jump over a corpse before burial, or that person would become a vampire and return to plague his friends and relatives. In some Balkan villages, when it was suspected that a person might be or become a vampire, a stout stake is driven through the heart of the corpse upon interment. But there were no such stakes in the Dragalevtsy cemetery.

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Funeral ceremonies could not be extensive since the body had to be in the ground within twenty-four hours after death. One of the last funerals I attended was that of an old woman whom I had interviewed on one occasion. When the priest arrived he found the room filled with about twenty people, two-thirds of whom were relatives and one-third neighbors. The body dressed in the best holiday costume was placed on a black, rough wooden coffin with some white flowers, dahlias, and fruit such as oranges and apples. Around the head and under the chin was a white band. The room became blue with incense smoke through which the black cover of the coffin, standing against the wall, could scarcely be seen. The chanting of the priest was constantly interrupted by the wailing of the women.

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At the conclusion of the service in the house, four men bore the coffin into the yard as the wailing continued. All the sons and daughters carried under their arms new garments which their mother had

764 left for them. The procession, which formed in the yard, was led by a boy carrying the boiled wheat to be placed on the grave; another carried the flower-decked grave marker on which the name, date of birth, and date of death had already been inscribed; a third boy carried a bowl of fruit, and a fourth a cross. The priest came next, wearing over his right shoulder a pair of socks, a gift from the deceased woman. Following him, with the covered coffin, were the four pallbearers, each with a kerchief pinned to his coat. A relative carried a loaf of special bread and was followed by the other relatives near the coffin. Neighbors came next. The women wore black kerchiefs tied with a loose knot instead of the customary tight knot.

The procession moved through the gateway into the street, leaving behind the homestead where the woman had come as a bride, where each of her children had been born, and to which her husband would return a lonely widower. As we moved up the street the husband said to me, "Well, we're putting the old woman away." He was stoical, resigned, but deeply grieved. On the way to the church the procession stopped at each crossroad, symbolic of the Stations of the Cross on the way to Calvary. There was a brief ceremony in front of the church door after which the coffin was carried inside and put on chairs in the center of the church. On the small table at the head of the coffin there were a large pan of bread and bottles of liquid. Early in the ceremony everybody burned candles around the coffin; at a given sign these candles were taken away. At the end of the ceremony all performed the "last kiss," kissing the icon which rested on the body and the hand of the deceased.

The body was taken to the cemetery where quite a few superstitious practices were carried out in the presence of the priest, but without his "noticing" what was being done. There were no professional wailers at the funeral; but two women loudly mourned for the infant each had recently lost and constantly asked the departed one to deliver messages to their children. Only the close relatives made any show of grief, while all the rest maintained a dignified silence.

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tongue in water without salt, and the brothers take three sips of the soup. The rest has to be eaten by the sick person during three days: first the tongue, then the eyes, and then the brain. The carcass is taken by the redeemer and the old woman secretly to the tree. Arrived there, they cross themselves and say: 'Good evening to our NN.' The redeemer digs a hole, and the seeress puts the carcass into it saying: 'To the black earth we give: brain for brain, eyes for eyes, feet for feet, and the earth is to give us: health and joy, laughter and jest, speech and discourse to carry back to our NN.' The brother also repeats this three times and covers up the body, and on this spot they put the water-pot and the basil. They say: 'We kill you, we revive our NN.' After crossing themselves they return taking care not to be seen by anybody. Arrived at the house of the sick person the redeemer knocks at and kicks the door: 'Open the heavy gates!' The mother answers from inside: 'What do you bring?'—'We bring day for night, laughter for tears, jest for sorrow, health in place of sickness for our brother NN.' They go in to the sick person, who has to ask: 'What good news?' The redeemer says: 'We bring you day, laughter, jest, joy and health—here!' and makes as though to hand him these gifts, and they embrace.¹

In another district of Serbia the doctress (*vračka*) chains the survivor to the cross of a nameless grave or fetters him at a cross-roads or to a grafted tree, and opening and shutting the fetters—the hobbles of a horse—repeats the usual question and answer with the brother by adoption ('Do you accept', etc., etc.) three times. The sick person washes with charmed water and 'leaves the sickness behind him'.²

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In Bulgaria a stone of the weight of the surviving colunar was put into the coffin with the corpse, and the redeeming 'brother' lay down beside it. As he rose he said: 'I leave

¹ M. Milosavljević, *op. cit.* pp. 261 *passim*.

² T. M. Buketić, *Narodna Medicina*, S.E.Z. xvii, p. 364; cf. footnotes, pp. 89-95. Cf. Miličević, *Život Srba Seljaka*, p. 339.

THE RITUAL OF HEALING

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you this stone for a brother and I take So-and-So to be my brother.¹

Redemption need not always be carried out by a brother by adoption but can be secured by the mother of the person to be redeemed or by a wise woman, e.g. by cutting a silver coin in two on the threshold and burying half in the grave of the dead child,² or by putting a stone of the same weight as the survivor on the grave, or a candle of the same length, or by fettering the living to the corpse or on the grave and releasing him.

The colunars can be separated while still alive by giving them the yolk of an egg to eat while standing on opposite sides of a stream (Macedonia).³ The sick person and the redeemer brother are given a sugared egg to eat together on the threshold at Zagubica. In other rites the substitution is carried out by a fiction. While the dead child is still lying in the house, two candles are made to the measurement of the dead and the living colunar, and two bunches of basil are tied, one with red and the other with black thread. The living child lies down beside the corpse. A woman crosses herself, lights the candles and places them and the bunches of herbs at the heads of the children. She strikes the body and says: 'When you two see one another, then love one another.' She reverses the bunches, giving the red one which belongs to the living to the dead colunar. The other is given to the child's mother, who must keep it and never let the living child see it at any time. The same rite can be gone through, after burial, at the grave. The bunch of basil tied with black is left overnight at the grave, and the red bunch is afterwards buried in the grave. The living child is chained and padlocked to the cross at the grave-head. It is yet more curious that a willow tree can take the place of the dead child. Two sticks are cut, one to the length of the living child and the other to the length of the tree's shadow at mid-day. The rest of the rite, including the leaving of the dead

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[764]¹ N. A. Načov, *op. cit.* p. 68.² S. M. Grbić, *op. cit.* pp. 294-301.³ Cf. Sb.N.U. v, pp. 127, etc.